Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

Impact of Armed Conflict on Children

Report of Graça Machel, Expert of the Secretary-General of the United Nations

Selected Highlights

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G.M. College of Education
Raipur, Bantalab
Jammu.
Acc. No. 4388
Dated 1D

UNITED NATIONS
Department of Public Information

unicef
United Nations Children's Fund

New York, 1996

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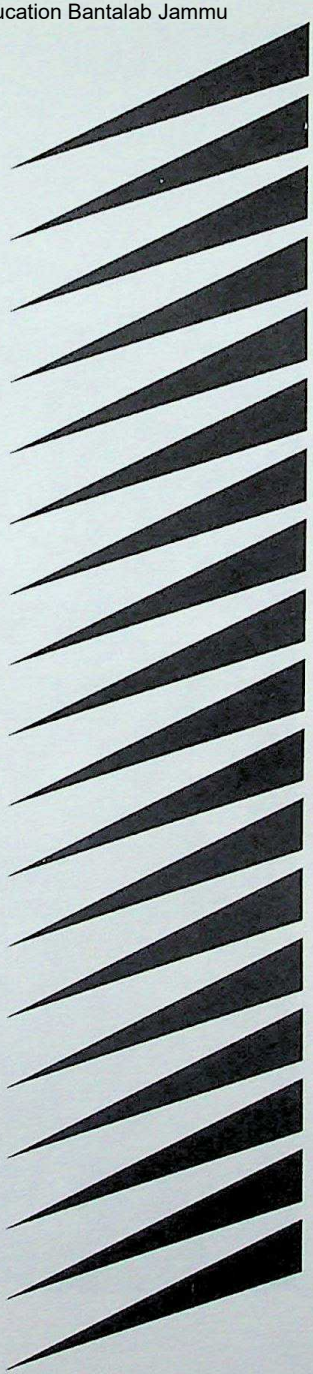
INTRODUCTION



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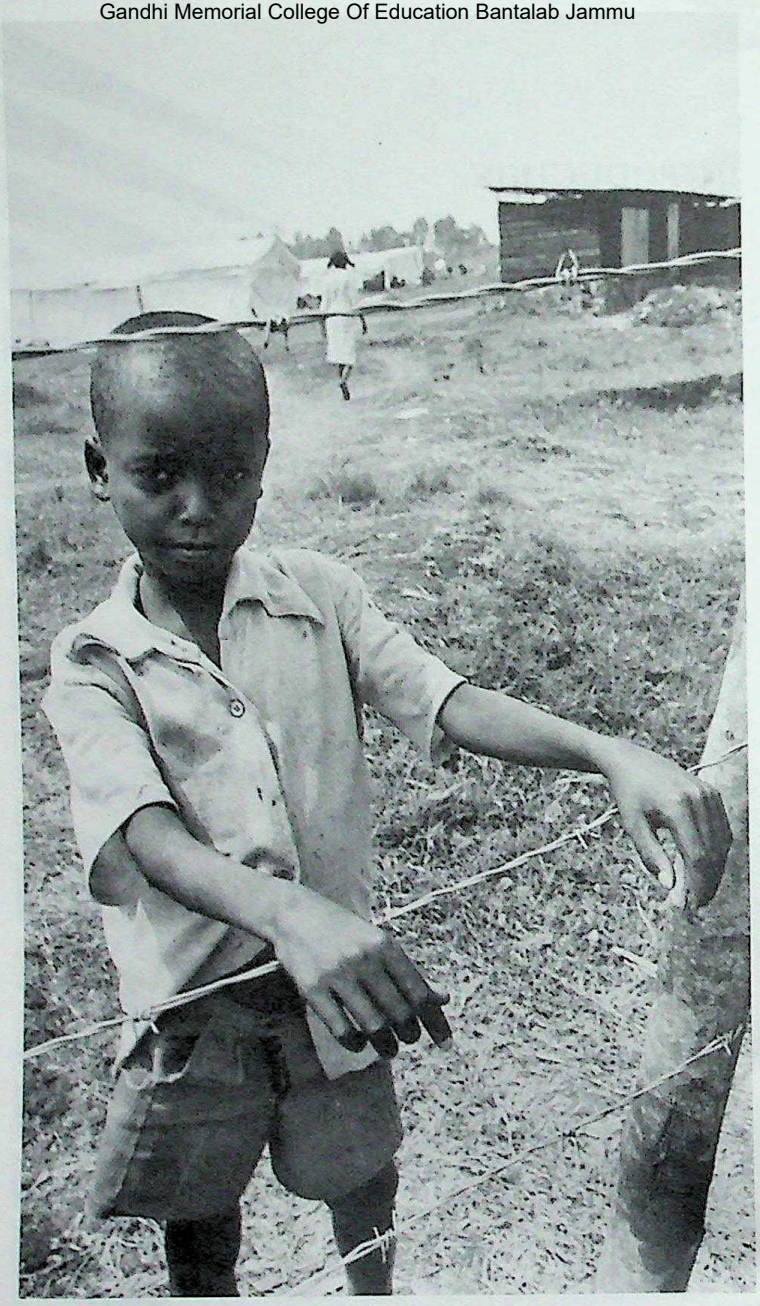

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INTRODUCTION

"The sources of conflict and war are pervasive and deep. To reach them will require our utmost effort to enhance respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, to promote sustainable economic and social development for wider prosperity, to alleviate distress and to curtail the existence and use of massively destructive weapons." United Nations Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, An Agenda for Peace, 1995.

Armed conflict, more than any other force, has transformed the lives of millions of children and women. Children and their families are not just getting caught in the crossfire. Many are being targeted. Nothing is spared, held sacred or protected. It is the singular characteristic of armed conflict in our time that children suffer most.

In the past decade alone, an estimated 2 million children have been killed in armed conflict. Three times as many have been seriously injured or permanently disabled. Countless others have been forced to witness or even to take part in horrifying acts of violence. These statistics are shocking enough, but more chilling is the conclusion to be drawn from them: more and more of the world is being sucked into a desolate moral vacuum, a space devoid of the most basic human values, a space in which children are slaughtered, raped and maimed, where children are exploited as soldiers, starved and exposed to extreme brutality.

Calling a halt to attacks on children

The lack of control and the sense of dislocation and chaos that characterize contemporary armed conflicts can be attributed to many factors, such as political upheavals and struggles for control over resources in the face of widespread poverty and economic disarray. The callousness of modern warfare may be a natural

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outcome of the social revolutions that have torn traditional societies apart. But whatever the causes, the time has come to call a halt. The international community must proclaim attacks on children for what they are – intolerable and unacceptable.

As a result of a recommendation of the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, the General Assembly in 1993 requested the Secretary-General to appoint an expert to study the impact of armed conflict on children. After two years of research, field visits and consultations, Graça Machel, the Secretary-General's Expert on the subject and a former Minister for Education in Mozambique, submitted a report, titled **Impact of Armed Conflict on Children** (document A/51/306 and Add. 1), to the 1996 session of the General Assembly. The report's most fundamental premise is that children simply have no part in warfare. It reveals the full extent of children's involvement in the armed conflicts raging around the world, and sets out the findings and recommendations aimed at Governments, entities of the United Nations system, intergovernmental and regional bodies, civil society organizations and individuals. This booklet is aimed at raising awareness among the widest possible audience of the impact of all forms of armed conflict on children. It focuses on some of the report's main recommendations for action. The examples provided in this publication have been drawn from research for the report on **Impact of Armed Conflict on Children**.

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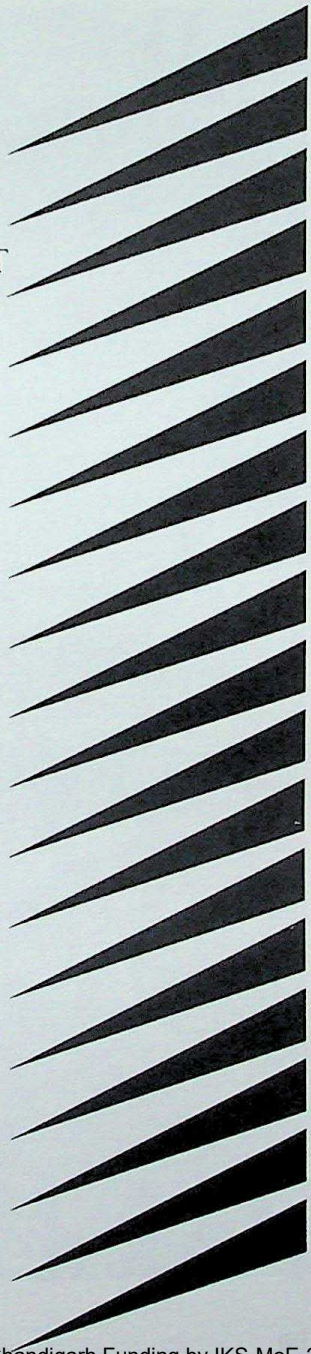
THE IMPACT OF ARMED CONFLICT ON CHILD DEVELOPMENT



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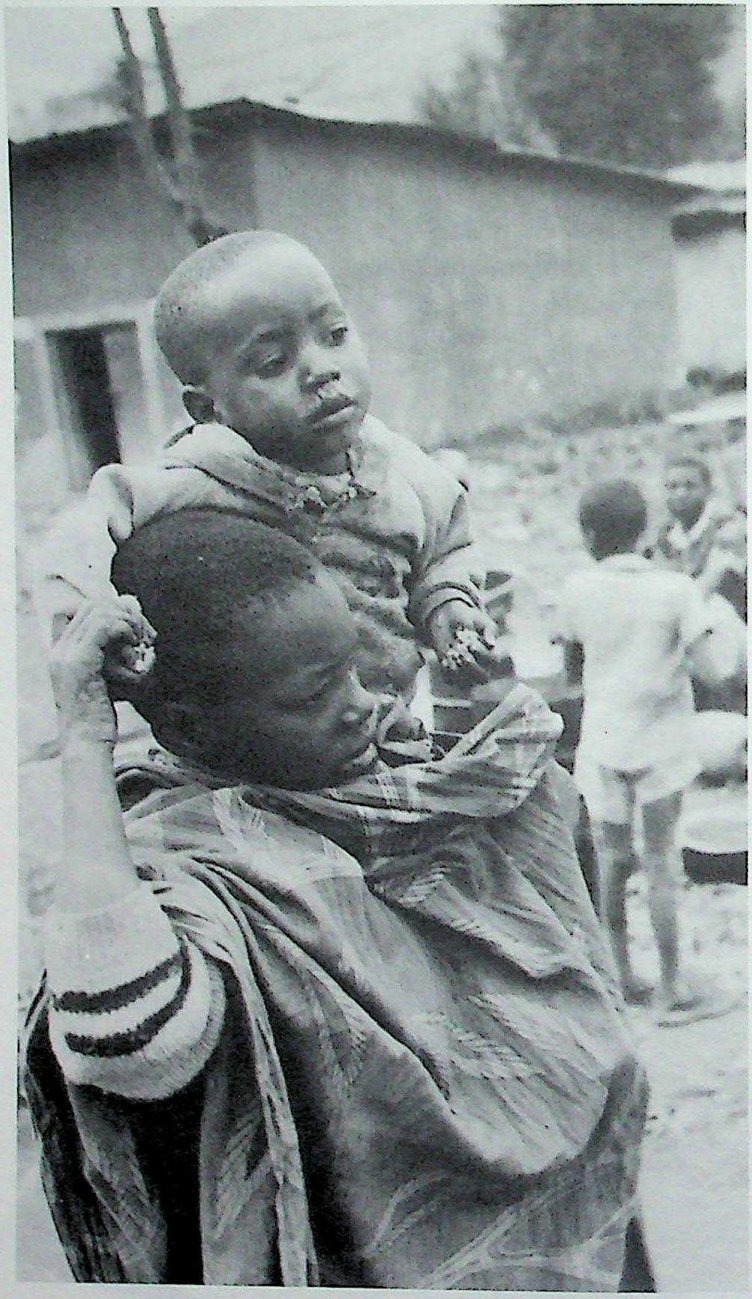

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THE IMPACT OF ARMED CONFLICT ON CHILD DEVELOPMENT

"Even if they have never seen a gun, millions of children suffer from wars, as resources that could have been invested in development are diverted into armaments. Indeed, one of the most distressing realities of our time is that most wars have been fought in precisely those countries that could least afford them." ***State of the World's Children,*** *United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), 1996.*

The wounds inflicted by armed conflict on children – physical injury, gender-based violence, psychosocial distress, are affronts to every impulse that inspired the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Armed conflict affects all aspects of child development – physical, mental and emotional. Such effects accumulate and interact with each other. To be effective, assistance must take account of each. The impact of armed conflict cannot be fully understood without looking at the related effects on women, families and the community support systems that provide protection and a secure environment for development. Children's well-being is best ensured through family and community-based solutions that draw on local culture and an understanding of child development.

The disruption of food supplies, the destruction of crops and agricultural infrastructures, the disintegration of families and communities, the displacement of populations and the destruction of educational and health services and of water and sanitation systems, all take a heavy toll on children. Article 39 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child states that "States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to promote physical and psychological recovery and social reintegration of a child victim

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of: any form of neglect, exploitation, or abuse; torture or any other form of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment; or armed conflicts. Such recovery and reintegration shall take place in an environment which fosters the health, self-respect and dignity of the child." Ensuring that health and nutrition, psychosocial well-being and education are priority components of humanitarian assistance is the best way to ensure children's physical and psychological recovery and social reintegration.

HEALTH AND NUTRITION

Armed conflict is a major public health hazard that cannot be ignored. Any disease that caused as much large-scale damage to children would long ago have attracted the urgent attention of public health specialists. When armed conflict kills and maims more children than soldiers, the health sector has a special obligation to speak out.

Thousands of children are killed every year as a direct result of fighting – from knife wounds, bullets, bombs and landmines, but many more die from malnutrition and disease caused or increased by armed conflicts. In Mozambique alone, between 1981 and 1988, armed conflict was the cause underlying 454,000 child deaths. Many of today's armed conflicts take place in some of the world's poorest countries, where children are already vulnerable.

Children are the most vulnerable to collective assaults on health and well-being. At the height of the conflict in Somalia, more than half the deaths of children in some places were caused by measles. Diarrhoea is another common and often deadly disease. Cholera is a constant threat as exemplified in refugee camps in Bangladesh, Kenya, Malawi, Nepal, Somalia and Zaire. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that half the world's refugees may be infected with tuberculosis, as crowded conditions in refugee camps provide a breeding ground for infections. Malaria and acute respiratory infections, including pneumonia, also claim many lives.

Disrupted health services and food supplies

In most wars, health facilities come under attack, in direct violation of international humanitarian law. Those facilities that remain open during a conflict are often looted or forced to close down, and the

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remainder are sometimes difficult to reach because of curfews. Restrictions on travel also hamper the distribution of drugs and other medical supplies, causing health systems' referral services and logistic support to break down. Many of the health services of a country are diverted to the needs of military casualties. Hospitals are forced to neglect the regular care of patients or to shift them to health centres. A concentration on military needs also means that children injured in a conflict may not get effective treatment or rehabilitation. Children living with disabilities get little, if any, support. For children, a dangerous implication of the breakdown of a country's health facilities during conflicts is the disruption of vaccination programmes.

Children as "zones of peace"

Claiming children as "zones of peace" has become an important concept of humanitarian relief programmes. Commitment to this principle by all warring parties has taken various forms. In El Salvador, beginning in 1985, Government and rebel forces agreed to three "days of tranquillity" during which 250,000 children were immunized against polio, measles, diptheria and other diseases, a process that was repeated annually for six years until the end of the civil war. In Afghanistan in 1988-1989, health teams were permitted to operate in both Government and rebel-held areas, raising vaccination levels in some areas above 80 per cent. In the case of Operation Lifeline Sudan, arrangements were made for "corridors of peace" so that relief supplies and vaccines could be delivered during relative lulls in the conflict.

One of the most immediate effects of armed conflict is the disruption of food supplies. Farmers, who are often women and older children, become fearful of working on plots of land too far from their homes. They reduce the area under cultivation, and their water sources, systems of irrigation and flood control may also be destroyed. Restrictions on movement limit access to such necessities as seeds and fertilizers and stop farmers from taking

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their produce to market. Most households in developing countries, including many farm households, rely on market purchases to meet their food needs. Economic disarray heightens unemployment, reducing people's ability to buy food.

Sometimes, damage to food systems is deliberate. For example, in the early 1980s in Ethiopia, the Government's scorched earth policies destroyed hundreds of thousands of acres of food-producing land. In many countries, landmines prevent the use of agricultural land. In contravention of international law, warring parties may block relief supplies or divert them for their own use. Feeding centres for children and vulnerable groups are frequently bombed or attacked.

Warfare also takes its toll on livestock. This creates particular problems for young children who rely on milk as part of their basic diet. In the Kongor area of Sudan, the massacre of cattle reduced livestock from around 1.5 million to 50,000.

Malnutrition and the importance of breastfeeding

Adequate nourishment depends on the way food is distributed, the way children are fed, hygiene and the time parents have available to care for children. Malnutrition can affect all children, but it causes the greatest mortality and morbidity among young children, especially those under three years of age. Breastfeeding provides ideal nutrition for infants, reduces the incidence and severity of infectious diseases and contributes to women's health.

During conflicts, mothers may experience hunger, exhaustion and distress that can make them less able to care for their children. Breastfeeding may be endangered by the mother's loss of confidence in her ability to produce milk. The general disruption in routine can separate mothers from their children for long periods. As conflicts proceed, social structures and networks break down. Knowledge about breastfeeding is passed from one generation to the next, and this can be lost when people flee and families are broken up. Yet artificial feeding, risky at all times, is even more dangerous in unsettled circumstances. Unless mothers are severely

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malnourished, they can breastfeed adequately despite severe stress. In times of armed conflict, it is important to support women's capacity to breastfeed by providing adequate dietary intake for lactating women and ensuring that they are not separated from their children.

Reproductive health

The effects of armed conflicts – the fragmenting of family and community, rapid social change, the breakdown of support systems, increased sexual exploitation and rape, malnutrition, and inadequate health services, including poor ante-natal care — make it imperative that reproductive health care be given high priority. Health education, care and counselling are especially important for women and girls who have been raped or who have been forced into prostitution. The potential for the spread of sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS, increases dramatically during conflicts. The breakdown of health services, and blood transfusion services lacking the ability to screen for HIV/AIDS, contribute to the increase in transmission.

In war-affected populations, gynaecological and paediatric health services are often unavailable. An obstacle to the full use of health services in emergencies is that they are often dominated by men, whether expatriate or from the host country. As a result, many women and girls, for cultural or religious reasons, underutilize the services despite risks to their health. One way to overcome this obstacle is to increase the numbers of available female health and protection professionals.

Some recommendations for action

- Parties to a conflict should be obliged to maintain basic health systems and services and water supplies.
- Special attention should be paid to primary health care and the care of children with chronic or acute conditions. Adequate rehabilitative care, such as the provision of artificial limbs for injured or permanently disabled children, should be ensured to facilitate the fullest possible social integration.
- Child-focused health needs assessments involving local professionals, young people and communities should be speedily

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carried out by organizations working in conflict situations, and should take into account food, health and care factors and the coping strategies likely to be used by the affected population.

- During conflicts, Governments and non-State entities should be encouraged to facilitate "days of tranquillity" or "corridors of peace" to ensure continuity of basic child health measures and delivery of humanitarian relief.
- Parties in conflict should refrain from destroying food crops, water sources and agriculture infrastructures in order to minimize disruption of food supply and production capacities.
- Emergency relief should give attention to the rehabilitation of agriculture, livestock and fisheries and to employment or income-generating programmes, to enhance local capacities to improve household security on a self-reliant and sustainable basis.
- Health professionals must be advocates of the rights of the child. WHO, in collaboration with professional, humanitarian and human rights organizations, should encourage paediatricians and all other doctors and health workers to disseminate child rights information and to report rights violations encountered in the course of their work.

PROMOTING PSYCHOLOGICAL RECOVERY AND SOCIAL REINTEGRATION

Historically, those concerned with the situation of children during armed conflict have focused primarily on their physical vulnerability. But the loss, grief and fear a child has experienced must also be taken into account. For increasing numbers of children living in war-torn nations, childhood has become a nightmare. Armed conflict destroys homes, separates families, splinters communities, breaks down trust among people and disrupts health and education services, undermining the very foundation of children's lives. The psychosocial concerns intrinsic to child develoment must be taken into account. Seeing their parents or other important adults in their lives as vulnerable can severely undermine children's confidence and add to their sense of fear. As bad as these experiences are, many children have witnessed their parents' torture, murder or rape, and have been threatened with death themselves.

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In a UNICEF survey of 3,030 children in Rwanda in 1995, nearly 80 per cent had lost immediate family members, and more than one third of these had actually witnessed the murders.

When children have experienced traumatic or other events in times of war, they may suffer from increased anxiety about being separated from their families, or they may have nightmares or trouble sleeping. They may cease playing and laughing, lose their appetites and withdraw from contact. Younger children may have difficulty concentrating in school. Older children and adolescents may become anxious or depressed, feel hopeless about the future or develop aggressive behaviour.

Best practices for recovery

Experience has shown that with supportive caregivers and secure communities, most children will achieve a sense of healing. Helping war-affected children to build on their own strengths and resilience, in collaboration with trusted caregivers, is an important strategy in the process of healing. Integrating modern knowledge of child development and child rights with local concepts and practices will result in more effective and sustainable ways to meet children's needs. Although many symptoms of distress have universal characteristics, the ways in which people express, embody and give meaning to their distress are largely dependent on social, cultural and political contexts and are based on different belief systems.

All phases of emergency and reconstruction assistance programmes should take psychosocial considerations into account, while avoiding the development of separate mental health programmes. Such programmes should also give priority to preventing further traumatic experiences, such as preventing family separation, undertaking practical measures to prevent gender-based violence, and avoiding the isolation and stigmatization that can result from institutionalization. Exploring a child's experience with violence and the meaning it holds in her or his life is important to the process of healing and recovery. While many forms of external

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assistance can help to promote psychosocial recovery, such explorations with children should take place in a stable, supportive environment, by caregivers who have solid and continuing relationships with the child. Ethical issues and confidentiality must be carefully considered. When journalists or researchers encourage a child to relate "horror stories", the interview can open up old wounds and tear down a child's defenses. Children who are photographed and identified by name can become vulnerable to additional harassment.

It is important that those who wish to help with the healing process have a deep understanding of and respect for the societies in which they are working. Aside from knowing the basic principles of child development and the way it is understood locally, they should also understand local culture and practices, including the rites and ceremonies related to growing up and becoming an adult, as well as those associated with death, burial and mourning.

An African girl at the age of 10 was made to witness her mother's rape and murder, and was herself forced to serve for two years as a concubine for rebel soldiers. After finally managing to escape, she went for treatment at the provincial hospital. A nurse realized there was something particularly wrong with the girl. In addition to having contracted a sexually transmitted infection, she was very withdrawn and sad. Encouraged by the nurse's soft and caring treatment, the girl told her story. She repeated it later to a social worker and was moved to a foster home, where she developed a close relationship with her foster mother. At the girl's wish, a traditional cleansing ceremony was held to rid her of all the bad things that had befallen her.

Children who have been continually exposed to violence almost always experience a significant change in their beliefs and attitudes, including a fundamental loss of trust in others. This is especially true of children who have been attacked or abused by people previously considered neighbours or friends, as happened in

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Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia. Rebuilding the ability to trust is a universal challenge in the wake of conflicts, but it is particularly important for those who are a part of children's daily lives.

A number of activities have been identified as supporting healing by fostering in children a sense of purpose, self-esteem and identity. These include establishing daily routines such as going to school, preparing food, washing clothes and working in the fields; providing children with the intellectual and emotional stimulation through structured group activities such as play, sports, drawing, drama and story-telling; and providing the opportunity for expression, attachment and trust that comes from a stable, caring and nurturing relationship with adults.

Through training and raising awareness of central caregivers, including parents, teachers and community health workers, a diversity of programmes can enhance the community's ability to provide for children and vulnerable groups. Rather than focusing on a child's emotional wounds, programmes should aim to support healing processes and re-establish a sense of normalcy.

Empowering families and communities in the healing process

The family is essential to children's care and protection and is an important social, economic and cultural factor in child development. But often, families are worn down by conflicts, both physically and emotionally, and face increased impoverishment. The most effective and sustainable approach to recovery is to mobilize the existing social care system. This could involve mobilizing a refugee community to support suitable foster families or extended family systems for the care of unaccompanied children. Another alternative is to provide care through peer-group living arrangements that are strongly integrated into communities. Institutional approaches can contribute to isolation and stigmatization and have proven ineffective.

Some recommendations for action

- All phases of emergency and reconstruction assistance programmes should take psychosocial considerations into account, while avoiding the development of separate mental health

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programmes. They should also give priority to preventing further traumatic experiences.

- Rather than focusing on a child's emotional wounds, programmes should aim to support healing processes and re-establish a sense of normalcy.
- Programmes to support psychosocial well-being should include local culture, perceptions of child development, and an understanding of political and social realities and children's rights. They should mobilize the community care network around children.
- Governments, donors and relief organizations should prevent the institutionalization of children. When groups of children considered vulnerable, such as child soldiers, are singled out for special attention, it should be done with the full cooperation of the community so as to ensure their long-term reintegration.

EDUCATION: INVESTING IN THE FUTURE OF CHILDREN

Education has a crucial preventive and rehabilitative part to play in fulfilling the needs and rights of children in conflict and post-conflict situations. Education also serves much broader functions. It gives shape and structure to children's lives and can instil community values, promote justice and respect for human rights and enhance peace, stability and interdependence.

Unfortunately, not even schools are safe from attack during times of armed conflict. In rural areas the school building may be the only substantial permanent structure, making it highly susceptible to shelling, closure or looting. Often, local teachers are prime targets because they are important community members or because they may hold strong political views. The destruction of education networks represents one of the greatest developmental setbacks for countries affected by armed conflict. Lost education and vocational skills take years to replace, making the overall task of postwar recovery even more difficult.

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If countries continue to employ four times as many soldiers as teachers, education and social systems will remain fragile and inadequate, and Governments will continue to fail children and break the promises made to them through ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. ***Impact of Armed Conflict on Children****, United Nations, 1996.*

During armed conflicts, fear and disruption make it difficult to create an atmosphere conducive to learning, and the morale of both teachers and pupils is likely to be low. As conflicts drag on for months or even years, economic and social conditions suffer and educational opportunities become more limited or even cease to exist altogether. Sometimes, even when educational opportunities exist in war-torn areas, parents may be reluctant to send their children to school. They may be afraid that the children will not be safe while they are on their way to and from school, or during classes. Mothers and fathers may need their children to work in the fields, in shops or at home caring for the youngest children.

Educational activity must be established as a priority component of all humanitarian assistance. When children have been forced to leave their homes and are crowded into displaced persons camps, establishing schooling systems as soon as possible reassures everyone by signaling a degree of stability and a return to normal roles and relationships within the family and community. Refugee children can sometimes attend regular schools in host countries, as provided for in international law, though very few get the opportunity to do so. Some host Governments refuse to provide — or to allow international agencies to provide — educational activity for refugee children. The efforts of United Nations agencies and other organizations to meet the educational service needs of children affected by conflict require significantly increased support.

Creative ways to maintain education

Even in situations of armed conflict, it is important to carry on educating children and young people, no matter how difficult the circumstances. Education promotes their psychosocial and physical

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well-being. Teachers can recognize signs of stress in children as well as impart vital survival information on issues such as personal safety and health or the dangers of landmines. They can also promote tolerance and respect for human rights. Since schools are likely to be targets for military attack, alternative sites for classrooms can be established, as was done in Eritrea in the late 1980s when classes were often held under trees, in caves or in camouflaged huts built from sticks and foliage. Similar arrangements were made during the height of the fighting in many places in the former Yugoslavia, where classes were held in the cellars of people's homes, often by candlelight.

One important innovation in educating children in emergency situations has been the development by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and UNICEF of a Teacher's Emergency Pack (TEP), otherwise known as "school-in-a-box". The pack contains basic materials: brushes and paints, chalk, paper, pens, pencils and exercise books. It was first used in Somalia in 1992 and further refined in the refugee camps in Djibouti. The packs were widely used for Rwandan refugees at Ngara in Tanzania, where children attended primary schools in tents on a shift basis.

Education can also incorporate flexible systems of "distance learning": home or group study using pre-packaged teaching materials complemented by broadcast and recorded media. Such systems are especially valuable for girls when parents are reluctant to have them travel far from home. Education can also be strengthened through a variety of community channels. In Sierra Leone, non-traditional teachers, including mothers and adolescents, were trained and deployed. When public sector agencies are absent or severely weakened, community groups and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) can support local educational administrators in their efforts to keep children in schools. For example, a group of Sri Lankan children who had lost one or both parents in the civil war were refused entry to primary school because they had no

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birth certificates and no money to pay the high fee demanded to issue a new one. An international NGO working in the country brought the situation to the notice of the National Child Rights Coalition, which took it up with the education authorities. The children received their birth certificates and were able to attend school.

Educating for peace

All sectors of society must come together to build "ethical frameworks", integrating traditional values of cooperation through religious and community leaders with international legal standards, such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Some of the groundwork for this can be laid in schools. Both the content and the process of education should promote peace, social justice, respect for human rights and the acceptance of responsibility. Children need to learn the skills of negotiation, problem solving, critical thinking and communication that will enable them to resolve conflicts without resorting to violence. To achieve these goals, a number of countries have already undertaken peace education programmes. In Lebanon, the Education for Peace Programme, jointly undertaken in 1989 by the Lebanese Government, NGOs, youth volunteers and UNICEF, now benefits thousands of children. The Student Palaver Conflict Management Programme in Liberia employs adolescents as resources in peer conflict resolution and mediation activities in schools.

In Sri Lanka, an Education for Conflict Resolution Programme has been integrated into primary and secondary school education. An innovative element is the programme's use of various public media to reach out-of-school children and other sectors of the community. While such initiatives are not always successful, they are indispensable to the eventual rehabilitation of a shattered society.

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Some recommendations for action

- All possible efforts should be made to maintain education systems during conflicts. The international community must insist that Government or non-State entities involved in conflicts not target educational facilities, and indeed promote active protection of such services.
- Preparation should also be made for sustaining education outside of formal school buildings, using community facilities and strengthening alternative education through a variety of community channels.
- Donors should extend the boundaries of emergency funding to include support for education. The establishment of educational activity, including the provision of teaching aids and basic education materials, should be accepted as a priority component of humanitarian assistance.
- As soon as camps are established for refugees or internally displaced persons, children and youth should be brought together for educational activities. Incentives for attendance should also be encouraged through, for example, measures to promote safety and security.
- Support for the re-establishment and continuity of education must be a priority strategy for donors and NGOs in conflict and post-conflict situations. Teachers should be trained to understand the ways in which conflict affects children as well as to impart vital survival information on issues such as landmines, health and promoting respect for human rights.

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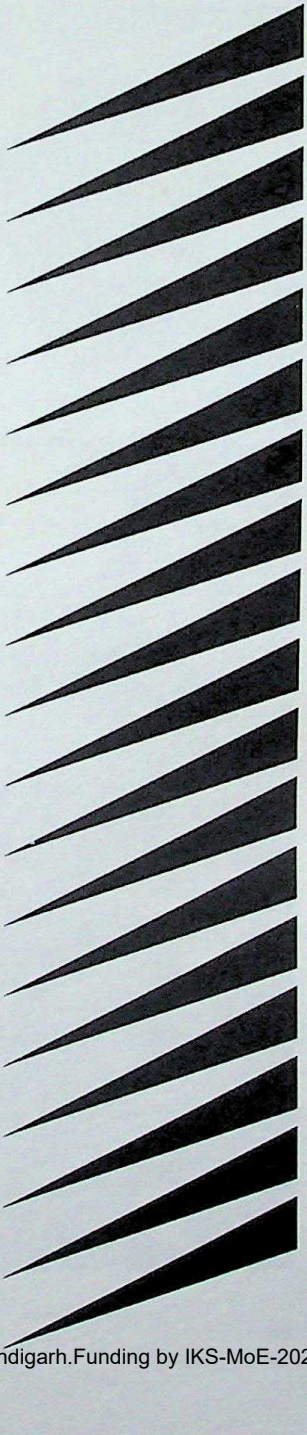
SPECIAL CONCERNS



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SPECIAL CONCERNS

"Children need be the victims of war only if there is no will to prevent it. Experiences in dozens of conflicts confirm that extraordinary actions have been taken and can be taken to protect and provide for children." ***State of the World's Children,*** *UNICEF, 1996.*

Within assistance programmes designed to promote health and nutrition, psychosocial well-being and education, attention must be given to the special circumstances created by armed conflict. This includes the millions of war-affected children and their families being forced to flee their homes, to be displaced within their countries or crossing borders as refugees. During armed conflicts, children and women also face a heightened risk of rape, sexual humiliation, prostitution and other forms of gender-based violence, which are downplayed as an unfortunate but inevitable side effect of war. Children are increasingly participating in war as combatants, and they are being deliberately recruited by government or rebel armies. Both during and after conflicts, children remain exposed to the dangers of landmines and millions of pieces of unexploded ordnance – bombs, shells and grenades that fail to detonate on impact. The special needs of adolescents are often neglected during times of conflict and in the post-conflict rebuilding of their societies.

Coupled with the rapid social change which often precedes or accompanies war, armed conflict leads to a breakdown in the family support systems so essential to a child's survival and development. Other forms of protection also slip away, particularly government and community support systems.

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CHILD SOLDIERS: AN AFFRONT TO HUMANITY

One of the most alarming trends relating to children and armed conflicts is their participation as active soldiers. Children as young as 8 years of age are being forcibly recruited, coerced and induced to become combatants. Manipulated by adults, children have been drawn into violence that they are too young to resist and with consequences they cannot imagine.

The children most likely to become soldiers are from impoverished and marginalized backgrounds or separated from their families. Children from wealthier and more educated families are often left undisturbed or are released if their parents can ransom them back.

Child soldiers are recruited in many different ways. Some are conscripted, others are press-ganged or kidnapped, and still others are forced to join armed groups to defend their families. In many instances, recruits are arbitrarily seized from the streets, or even from schools and orphanages, when armed militia, police or army cadres roam the streets, picking up anyone they encounter. Hunger and poverty may drive parents to offer their children for service; armies may even pay a child soldier's wage directly to the family. And parents may encourage their daughters to become soldiers if their marriage prospects are poor.

Sometimes, children become soldiers simply in order to survive. Indeed, a military unit can be something of a refuge, serving as a kind of surrogate family. Children may join if they believe that this is the only way to guarantee regular meals, clothing or medical attention.

Children are also used as soldiers in support functions such as cooks, porters, messengers and spies. While these may seem to be less harmful, these functions entail great hardship and risk bringing all children under suspicion. Reports tell of forces deliberately killing even the youngest children on the grounds that they were dangerous. For girls, their participation often entails being forced to provide sexual service. While children of both sexes might start out in indirect support functions, it does not take long before they are placed in the heat of the battle, where their inexperience and lack of training leave them particularly vulnerable.

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At the age of 13, I joined the student movement. I had a dream to contribute to make things change, so that children would not be hungry.... Later I joined the armed struggle. I had all the inexperience and the fears of a little girl. I found out that girls were obliged to have sexual relations to alleviate the sadness of the combatants. And who alleviated our sadness after going with someone we hardly knew?... There is a great pain in my being when I recall all these things.... In spite of my commitment, they abused me, they trampled my human dignity. And above all, they did not understand that I was a child and that I had rights. (From a Honduras case study)

Demobilization and reintegration of child soldiers

An urgent priority is to demobilize everyone under 18 years of age from the armed forces. The participation of children must be recognized in all peace agreements so that effective planning can be made for reintegration programmes.

The process of reintegration must help children establish new foundations in life. Re-establishing contact with the family and the community is important for former child soldiers who have grown up away from their families and who have been deprived of many of the normal opportunities for physical, emotional and intellectual development. Providing educational and vocational opportunities for former child combatants may prevent them from rejoining military units, and at the same time improve the economic security of their families. For a former child soldier, an education is more than a route to employment. It can also help to normalize life and to develop an identity separate from that of the soldier. A difficulty to be faced is the likelihood that former combatants may have fallen far behind in their schooling, and may be placed in classes with much younger children. Specific measures may be required, such as establishing special classes for former child soldiers, who can then be reintegrated into regular schools.

The progressive involvement of youth in acts of extreme violence desensitizes them to suffering. This experience makes

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children more likely to commit violent acts themselves and contributes to their break with society. The lure of ideology is particularly strong in early adolescence, when young people are developing personal identities and searching for a sense of social meaning. Child soldiers may find it difficult to disengage from the idea that violence is a legitimate means of achieving one's aims. The challenge for Governments and civil society is to channel the energy, ideas and experience of youth into contributing in positive ways to the creation of their new, post-conflict society.

No peace treaty to date has formally recognized the existence of child combatants. ***Impact of Armed Conflict on Children****, United Nations, 1996.*

Preventing the future use of children in armed conflict

Building on the principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, a number of organizations are working to raise the minimum age for recruitment and participation in armed forces to 18 years. In 1994, a United Nations working group was established to develop an Optional Protocol to the Convention in order to achieve this.

Several measures have been identified which can reinforce the local capacity to minimize or prevent the use of children as soldiers. For example, local communities should be made more aware of national and international laws governing the age of recruitment. Non-governmental organizations, religious groups and civil society in general can play important roles in establishing ethical frameworks that characterize children's participation in armed conflicts as unacceptable. In Peru, forced recruitment drives have declined where parish churches have denounced the activity. In El Salvador, Guatemala and Paraguay, ethnic groups and the mothers of child soldiers have formed organizations to pressure authorities for the release of under-age soldiers. Another important preventive measure is the active and early documentation and tracing of unaccompanied children in refugee or displaced persons camps. Locating refugee camps far from conflict zones can also

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reduce the chance of children being enticed or recruited into warring groups.

Some recommendations for action

- Support should be given to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, Rädda Barnen, the Quakers, UNICEF, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement in their efforts to eradicate the use of children under 18 years of age as soldiers.
- States should ensure the early and successful conclusion of the drafting of the Optional Protocol to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, raising the age of recruitment and participation to 18 years.
- United Nations agencies and international civil society actors should pursue quiet diplomacy with Government and non-State forces and their international supporters to encourage the immediate demobilization of child soldiers and adherence to the Convention on the Rights of the Child.
- The media should be encouraged to expose the use of child soldiers and the need for demobilization.
- All peace agreements should include specific measures to demobilize and reintegrate child soldiers into society. There is an urgent need for the international community to support programmes, including advocacy and social services, for the demobilization and community reintegration of child soldiers.

CHILDREN IN FLIGHT: REFUGEE AND INTERNALLY DISPLACED CHILDREN

Armed conflict has always caused population movements. Children who are forced to flee to neighbouring countries as refugees or who become internally displaced within their own countries are in need of special attention during armed conflict. People are brutally uprooted and forced to flee their homes, exposing them to danger and insecurity. Wherever it occurs, displacement has a profound physical, emotional and developmental impact on children and

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increases their vulnerability. Of the world's estimated 27 million refugees and 30 million displaced people, 80 per cent are women and children.

Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights recognizes that mothers and children are entitled to special care and assistance, and that all children have the right to social protection.

During flight from areas of conflict, families and children continue to be exposed to multiple physical dangers. They are threatened by sudden attacks, shelling, snipers and landmines. Often, they must walk for days with only limited quantities of water and food. Under such circumstances, children become acutely undernourished and prone to illness, and they are often the first to die. Girls in flight are especially vulnerable to gender-based violence.

Ideally, camps for refugees or the internally displaced should be places of safety, offering protection and assistance. However, old power struggles are often reproduced and traditional systems of social protection come under strain or break down completely. There are often high levels of violence, substance abuse, sexual assault, domestic violence and forcible recruitment. One important aspect of relief that particularly affects women and children is the distribution of resources such as food, water and plastic sheeting. Men are usually in charge of distribution and often abuse their power by demanding bribes and sexual favours. This puts women and adolescent heads of household at particular risk. The UNHCR "Guidelines on Prevention and Response to Sexual Violence" outline practical protection measures such as careful lighting, arrangement of latrines and organizing groups for such tasks as gathering firewood and collecting water.

The need for improved protection for internally displaced children

Children who are displaced but remain in their own countries face perilous circumstances, including a higher risk of dying.

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Internally displaced persons are people who have been forced to flee their homes in large numbers as a result of armed conflict, internal strife, systematic violation of human rights or natural or man-made disasters, and who are within the territory of their own country. The protection and assistance needs of the internally displaced are similar to those of refugees in nearly all respects, and yet their situation can be worse. While refugees have often moved outside the "war zone", internally displaced people usually remain within or close to the scene of conflict, and they are often likely to be displaced repeatedly.

In contravention of international humanitarian law, the access of internally displaced persons to humanitarian assistance is often impeded by various armed groups. While some organizations have specific mandates to provide assistance to refugees or address human rights violations, at present there is no clear institutional responsibility for the internally displaced.

Unaccompanied children

Unaccompanied children are those who are separated from both parents and are not in the care of another adult who, by law or custom, has taken responsibility to care for them. As a priority in all emergencies, procedures should be adopted to ensure the survival and protection of unaccompanied children. An overriding consideration should be to try to reunite them with their families. Wherever possible, unaccompanied children should be cared for by their extended family, and when this is not possible, by neighbours, friends or other substitute families, rather than in institutions.

In response to the conflict in Rwanda and extensive regional displacement, a vast tracing programme was set up in 1994 by the International Red Cross, UNHCR, UNICEF, Save the Children and other NGOs. More than 100,000 children were registered. By May 1996, more than 33,000 of these children had been reunited with family members.

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Unaccompanied children are frequently mistakenly regarded as available for adoption. Adoption permanently severs family links. Because of the difficulty of tracing children at the height of a conflict, unaccompanied children should not be considered available for adoption until all efforts to reunite families, including into the post-conflict phase, have been exhausted. This principle is safeguarded by a recommendation adopted in the 1994 Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Cooperation in respect to Inter-country Adoption.

To parents, evacuation of their children may appear to be the best solution, but this is frequently not the case. Evacuation poses a long-term risk to children, including the trauma of separation from the family and the increased danger of trafficking, sexual exploitation or illegal adoption. If evacuation is essential, whole families should move together, and if this is not possible, children should at least move with their primary caregivers and siblings. Great care should be taken to ensure that any evacuation is properly documented, and that arrangements are made for appropriate reception and care of children, for maintaining contact with family members and for early reunification. Guidelines on these criteria are supported by the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, UNHCR and UNICEF.

Some recommendations for action

- As a priority in all emergencies, procedures should be adopted to ensure the survival and protection of unaccompanied children. Family tracing programmes should be established at the outset of assistance programmes.
- Wherever possible, unaccompanied children should be cared for by their extended family, and when this is not possible, by neighbours, friends or other substitute families, rather than in institutions. No adoptions should be permitted until exhaustive

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family tracing, including into the post-conflict phase, has been attempted.

- Practical protection measures to prevent sexual violence, discrimination in delivery of relief materials, and the recruitment of children into armed forces must be a priority in all assistance programmes in refugee and displaced persons camps. Such measures should involve women and youth fully in their design, delivery and monitoring and include advocacy and social services to address abuses and violations of children's rights.

- In cooperation with the United Nations Department for Humanitarian Affairs (DHA) in its role as Emergency Relief Coordinator, and in consultation with other major humanitarian agencies, a lead agency should be assigned overall responsibility for the protection and assistance of internally displaced persons in each emergency. In collaboration with the lead agency, UNICEF should provide leadership for the protection and assistance of internally displaced children.

- The United Nations General Assembly, the United Nations Commission on Human Rights and regional organizations should support the work of the United Nations Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Internally Displaced Persons in developing an appropriate legal framework to increase protection for internally displaced persons and to give particular emphasis to the specific concerns of children.

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE: A WEAPON OF WAR

In times of war, the disintegration of families and communities leaves women and girls especially vulnerable to violence. Rape is a continual threat, as are other forms of gender-based violence, including prostitution, sexual humiliation and mutilation, trafficking and domestic abuse. Death, upheaval and poverty also increase tensions within the family and the likelihood of domestic violence. Women and girls are at risk of violence in all settings, whether in the home, during flight or in camps to which they have fled for safety. Children affected by gender-based violence also include those who have witnessed the rape of a family member, and those who

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are ostracized because of an assault on the mother. Acts of gender-based violence, particularly rape committed during armed conflicts, constitute a violation of international humanitarian law.

The damage inflicted by rape

Most child victims of violence and sexual abuse are girls, but boys are also affected. Rape is not incidental to conflict. It can occur on a random and uncontrolled basis due to the general disruption of social boundaries and the licence granted to soldiers and militias. Most often, however, it functions like other forms of torture and is used as a tactical weapon of war to humiliate and weaken the morale of the perceived enemy, to terrorize populations or to force civilians to flee. Systematic rape is often practised with the intent of ethnic cleansing through deliberate impregnation. The United Nations Special Rapporteur for the former Yugoslavia found that this was the case in Bosnia and Herzegovina and in Croatia.

The harm inflicted on a girl or woman is an attack on her family and culture. Wartime rape often has a tragic ripple effect that extends far beyond the pain and degradation of the rape itself. Rape victims who become pregnant are often ostracized by their families and communities and abandon their babies. Some may even commit suicide.

Two important efforts to ensure that relief workers are equipped to respond to the special needs of victims of sexual violence are UNHCR's "Guidelines on Prevention and Response to Sexual Violence" and "Guidelines on Evaluation and Care of Victims of Trauma and Violence".

Child victims of prostitution and sexual exploitation

In times of armed conflict, poverty, hunger and desperation may force women and girls into prostitution, obliging them to offer sex for food or shelter, for safe conduct through the war zone or to obtain papers for themselves and their families. The stationing of military troops concentrates large numbers of single men in some areas, including those serving in peace-keeping missions, and has

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been a factor in the growth of the commercial sexual exploitation of children.

Sexual exploitation has a devastating impact on physical and emotional development. Unwanted and unsafe sex can lead to unwanted pregnancies or sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS. Adolescent girls may suffer in silence after the trauma of sexual exploitation, fearing reprisals from those who attacked them or rejection by their families. They may feel a sense of personal humiliation and anguish which causes many of them to withdraw into a shell of pain and denial.

Seeking justice for victims of war crimes

The widespread practice of rape as an instrument of armed conflict and ethnic cleansing must be ended and its perpetrators prosecuted. In the case of the gravest abuses, international tribunals have been established to punish perpetrators of genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity in the former Yugoslavia and in Rwanda. But in order to fulfil their objectives, the tribunals need greater financial support and more determined political backing. The tribunals established to try accused war criminals in the former Yugoslavia have indicted only eight people on specific charges of rape and assault, despite estimates of up to 20,000 victims. This limited result underscores the difficulties in applying international human rights and humanitarian law to rape, difficulties that are reflected in both the codification and the interpretation of national, and even international, law.

Truth commissions are another important vehicle that can document the incidence and extent of human rights abuses against women and children in conflict situations, expose wrongdoing and reinforce personal accountability. National Truth Commissions have been established in a number of countries, such as Argentina, Burundi, El Salvador, South Africa, Uganda and Viet Nam. For victims of human rights abuses during conflict situations, they seek to facilitate healing, reconciliation and the reconstruction of affected families, communities and nations. The Commissions also reassert the fundamental importance and respect for the sanctity of human life and establish the ethical, moral, legal and political accountability of leaders and civil society.

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Some recommendations for action

- All humanitarian responses in conflict situations must emphasize the special reproductive needs of women and girls, including access to family planning services, care during pregnancy as a result of rape, sexual mutilation, childbirth at an early age or infection with sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS. Equally important are the psychosocial needs of mothers who have been subjected to gender-based violence and who need help in order to foster the conditions necessary for the healthy development of their children.
- All military personnel, including peace-keeping personnel, should receive, as part of their training, instruction on their responsibilities towards civilian communities and particularly towards women and children.
- Clear and easily accessible systems should be established for reporting on sexual abuse within both military and civilian populations.
- The treatment of rape as a war crime must be clarified, pursued within military and civilian populations and punished accordingly. Appropriate legal and rehabilitative remedies must be made available to reflect the nature of the crime and its harm.
- Refugee and displaced persons camps should be designed to improve security for women and girls. Women should also be involved in all aspects of camp administration but especially in organizing distribution and security systems. Increased numbers of female personnel should be deployed to the field as protection officers and counsellors.
- In every conflict, support programmes should be established for victims of sexual abuse and gender-based violence. These should offer confidential counselling on a wide range of issues, including the rights of victims. Such programmes should also provide educational activities and skills training.

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THE DEVASTATION OF LANDMINES AND UNEXPLODED ORDNANCE

Landmines pose one of the most insidious and persistent dangers, causing untold suffering to millions of children caught up in armed conflict. Mines continue their devastation long after a conflict ends, often for decades. Today, children in at least 68 countries live amid the threat of more than 110 million landmines still lodged in the ground, awaiting an unwary step. Added to this are millions of items of unexploded ordnance (UXO) – bombs, shells and grenades that failed to detonate. Like landmines, UXOs are indiscriminate weapons that are triggered by innocent and unsuspecting passers-by.

Children are particularly at risk. They are naturally curious about strange objects. Many of the explosives look like toys, pineapples or butterflies. Children may pick up or step on the devices while herding animals, working in the fields or searching for firewood. Even when warnings have been posted about the danger of mines, children may not be able to recognize or read these signs. One danger is that children and adults may become so used to mines that they forget they are lethal weapons.

Kou Ya, 4, and Sia Ya, 6, were leading the water buffalo to pasture in November 1993, when they noticed a round object in a ditch. It looked like the ball boys and girls toss during the Hmong New Year festivities. Sia Ya threw the bomb to her brother. It exploded, killing them both and wounding a passing cyclist.

Children have been known to use mines as wheels for toy trucks, and in Cambodia children have been seen playing boules with B40 anti-personnel mines. Mines and other devices have also become part of daily activities such as fishing, guarding private property and even settling domestic disputes. Such familiarity dulls awareness of the dangers of these devices.

The victims of mines tend to be concentrated among the poorest sectors of society; families already living on the edge of survival are often financially devastated by mine incidents. And

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when a parent is a mine casualty, the lost ability to work can greatly weaken the care and protection available to children.

Clearing landmines is dangerous and expensive, between $300 and $1,000 per mine, each of which originally cost as little as $3. Countries most contaminated by mines are generally among the world's poorest, with little prospect of being able to afford their own de-mining programmes.

The tasks ahead

Protecting children and other civilians from the scourge of landmines will require rapid progress and financial support in four major areas: a ban on landmines; humanitarian mine clearance that will eventually remove the problem; mine awareness programmes that help children to avoid injury; and rehabilitation programmes that help children recover.

The indiscriminate nature of landmines, the excessive suffering they cause civilians, the immense socio-economic impact and the damage they will continue to cause for years to come have stimulated an international campaign to ban their manufacture and use. In 1992, a global coalition of NGOs established the International Campaign to Ban Landmines. Since then, considerable progress has been made: the United Nations Secretary-General has advocated strongly for an end to the landmine scourge and a number of countries have already taken steps to ban the use, production, trade and stockpiling of such weapons.

Removing the danger of landmines requires a long-term international commitment to humanitarian mine clearance. The relatively new concept of humanitarian mine clearance is different from conventional military approaches. According to the United Nations, humanitarian mine clearance means that an area meets safety standards when it is 99.9 per cent free of landmines. Mine clearance should be adapted so that it can be used and sustained locally.

Mine awareness programmes help to recognize landmines and suspected mine areas and explain what to do when a mine is discovered or an incident occurs. Effective mine awareness programmes should not merely tell people about the issues, but should try to involve them in the learning process.

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A new programme developed by Save the Children for Afghanistan emphasizes participant involvement, child-to-child approaches, multi-media presentations, role playing, survivors as educators and the creation of safe play areas.

Girls are even less likely than boys to receive special medical attention and prostheses. The extended medical treatment, rehabilitation and psychosocial support that mine injuries demand make them extremely expensive for the families of the victims and thus require international support through development programmes.

Some recommendations for action

- Governments should immediately enact comprehensive national legislation to ban the production, use, trade and stockpiling of landmines and support the campaign for a worldwide ban. In order to reduce the UXO threat, Governments should also make concrete proposals to address the impact on children of other conventional weapons, such as cluster bombs and small calibre weapons.
- In reports to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, Governments, where relevant, should report on progress in enacting comprehensive legislation to ban the use, trade and stockpiling of landmines. They should also report on measures being taken in mine clearance and in programmes to promote children's awareness of landmines and the rehabilitation of those who have been injured.
- Humanitarian mine clearance should be established as part of all peace agreements, incorporating strategies to develop national capacity for mine clearance.
- Countries and companies that profit from the sale of mines should be especially required to contribute to funds designated for humanitarian mine clearance and mine awareness programmes.
- Measures to reduce the proliferation and trade of landmines, such as consumer boycotts, should be explored.

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- A technical workshop on mine awareness should be held by the United Nations Department of Humanitarian Affairs (DHA), UNICEF, UNESCO and involved NGOs, to assess lessons learned, promote best practices in child-focused mine awareness programmes and improve coordination, assessment and evaluation.

ADOLESCENTS: A NEGLECTED GROUP

The imagination, ideals and energies of youth are vital for the continuing development of the societies in which they live. All cultures recognize adolescence as a highly significant period in which young people learn future roles and incorporate the values and norms of their societies. Adolescents face particular problems during periods of armed conflicts. They are at a time of life when they are undergoing many physical and emotional changes. Yet during or after wars, youth seldom receive any special attention or assistance.

During armed conflicts, as educational opportunities become more limited or even non-existent, adolescent boys and girls may become frightened, bored and frustrated. Military life may become the most attractive option, especially for children from impoverished and marginalized backgrounds and those who have become separated from their families. Young people often take up arms to gain power, and power can act as a very strong motivator in situations where people feel powerless and otherwise unable to acquire basic resources. Others end up as soldiers against their will. During conflicts, adolescent girls are particularly at risk for gender-based violence and sexual exploitation.

The extreme and often prolonged circumstances of armed conflict can interfere with identity development. As a result, many adolescents, especially those who have had severely distressing experiences, cannot foresee any future for themselves. They may view their lives very pessimistically, suffer from serious depression or even commit suicide. They may have lost their trust in people, and may not wish to seek help or support from adults. Sudden changes in family circumstances, such as the death or disappearance of parents, can leave young people without guidance, role models and sustenance.

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Youth's role in rebuilding war-torn communities

Adolescents have special needs and special strengths, and they should be seen as survivors and active participants in creating solutions, not just as victims or problems. In order to ensure that their needs are met, young people should be involved in community-based relief, recovery and reconstruction programmes. This can be achieved through, for example, vocational and skills training that not only helps to augment youth's incomes, but also increases their sense of identity and self-worth in ways that enhance their psychosocial well-being. One particularly effective way to give adolescents a sense of meaning and purpose is to involve them in developing and implementing programmes for younger children in the community.

Protecting the most vulnerable family unit

Child-headed households may consist of "family units" of brothers and sisters who have been orphaned, abandoned, or separated accidentally from their parents, children of extended family members, or even unrelated children. Such households are headed by a minor, usually an adolescent girl. The needs of child-headed households for legal and social protection are especially acute. Such households are particularly vulnerable to exploitative labour and prostitution. Dilemmas have arisen in designing appropriate policy and programme responses, especially around the feasibility of foster arrangements. The principle of family unity, as safeguarded in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, must be the basis of all support for these children. One way to improve the well-being of child-headed households is to support Governments in creating laws that challenge discrimination against child-headed households in relation to custody, inheritance and property rights.

Some recommendations for action

- Programmes should place special emphasis on providing appropriate educational and recreational activities for adolescents affected by armed conflicts.
- Special efforts should be made for demobilized adolescent soldiers, such as projects which offer alternative livelihoods and promote their reintegration into their communities. Human

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resources development, including youth education, employment and training schemes, should be promoted.

- Intergovernmental bodies, United Nations agencies and other organizations should support Governments in strengthening national legislative frameworks challenging any aspect of discrimination against women, girls and child-headed households with particular respect to custody, inheritance and property rights.
- United Nations bodies and NGOs are urged to give urgent attention to the situation of child-headed households and develop policy and programme guidelines to ensure their protection and care.

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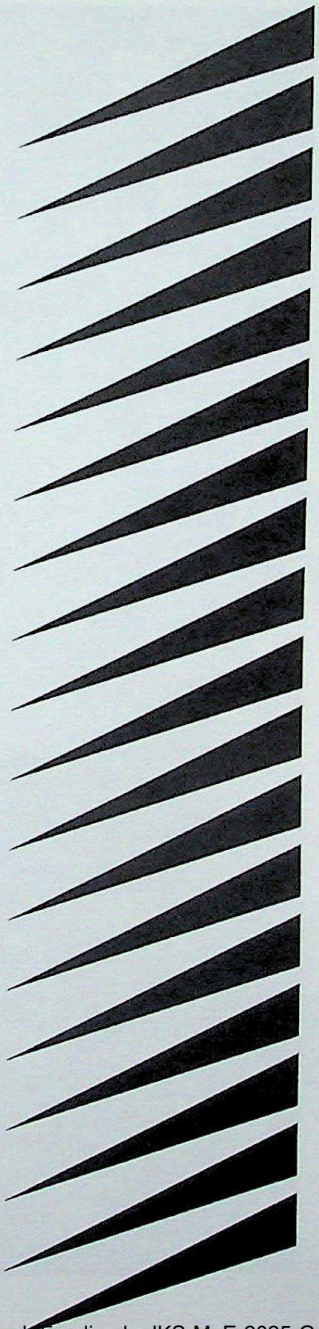
PROMOTING THE HUMAN RIGHTS OF CHILDREN



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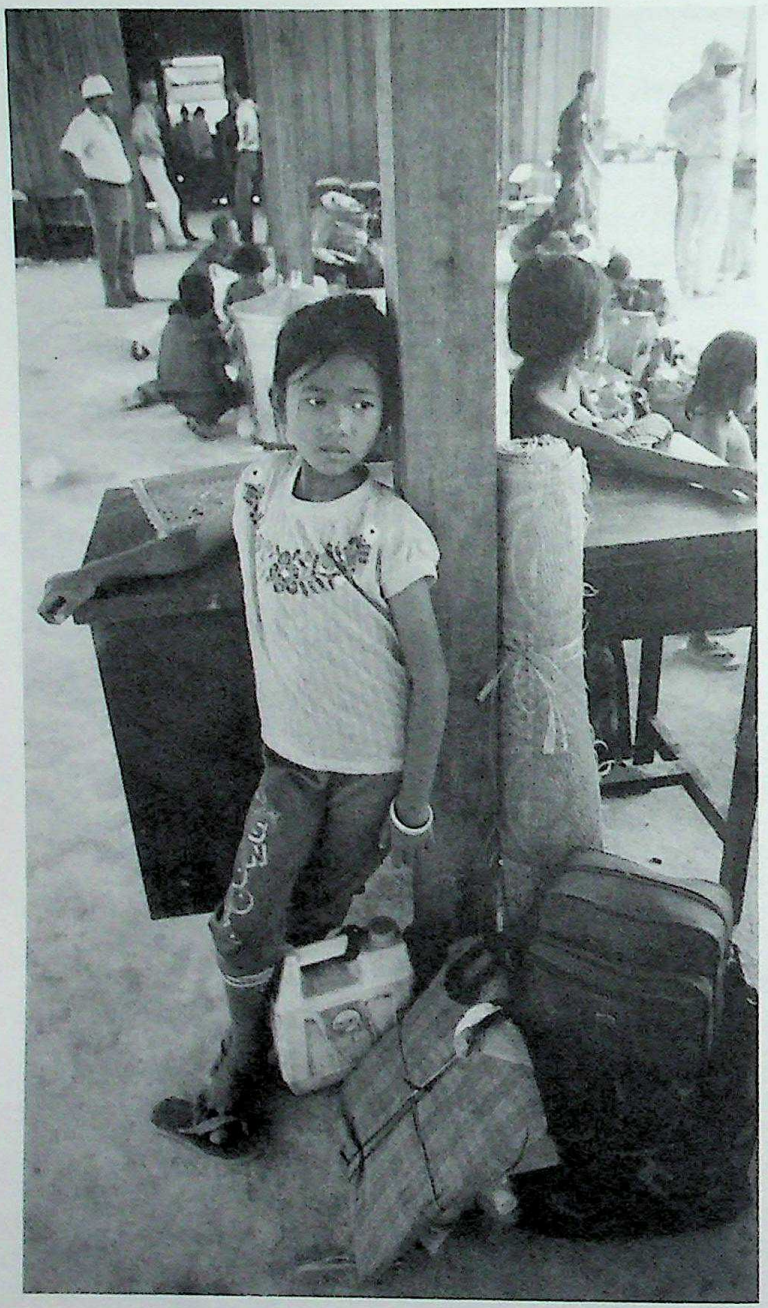

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PROMOTING THE HUMAN RIGHTS OF CHILDREN

"We want a society where people are more important than things, where children are precious; a world where people can be more human, caring and gentle." Archbishop Desmond Tutu at the meeting of the Eminent Persons Group on the Impact of Armed Conflict on Children, Tarrytown, New York, 9 May 1995.

One of the most urgent tasks when conflicts threaten is to find ways to protect children. Protection in this sense means not only defending them against aggression but also ensuring that their full range of rights and needs are respected and fulfilled. Through the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, now ratified by nearly all countries, the world has recognized that the rights of children include the right to have their basic needs met. Yet generations of children are being killed and wounded physically and emotionally by adult conflicts, in defiance of the international community's best legal instruments.

INTERNATIONAL LAW AND THE PROTECTION OF CHILDREN IN ARMED CONFLICT

Even though the principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Geneva Conventions and other international humanitarian and human rights law have been flouted, these instruments are genuine landmarks and provide a basis for action. Clearly, what is lacking are the mechanisms and the will for enforcement.

Protecting children requires much broader participation in the monitoring and reporting of human rights abuses. In order to enforce humanitarian and human rights law, there must be a determined effort to prosecute offenders. The international

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community must attach particular importance to responding effectively to every occasion when those involved in armed conflict trample on children's rights. Any purported "mitigating circumstances" through which Governments or their opponents seek to justify infringements of children's rights in times of armed conflict must be seen by the international community for what they are: reprehensible and intolerable.

Within the United Nations, the principal responsibility for monitoring human rights violations rests with the Commission on Human Rights. It can receive information from any source and take an active role in gathering data. When a country ratifies the Convention on the Rights of the Child, it must review its national laws to ensure that they are in line with the provisions of the Convention. The United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, composed of ten experts serving in their individual capacities, monitors constantly the implementation of the Convention by communicating with all States Parties on their progress and problems in promoting children's rights.

All international bodies working in conflict zones should establish procedures for prompt, confidential and objective reporting of violations that come to their attention. Civil society organizations should actively disseminate humanitarian and human rights law and engage in advocacy, reporting and monitoring of infringements of children's rights.

It is a basic need of children to be protected when conflicts threaten, and such protection requires the fulfilment of their rights through the implementation of international human rights and humanitarian law. ***Impact of Armed Conflict on Children****, United Nations, 1996.*

The protection of children is not just a national issue. It is also a legitimate concern of the international community. This is especially important since many of the most serious violations of children's rights occur in situations of conflict where there is currently no functioning national government. National and international strategies to protect the rights of children must

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enfranchise, empower and build the capacities of women, families and communities to address the root causes of conflict and strengthen local development.

Training and educating about human rights

Governments must train and educate the judiciary, police, security personnel and armed forces, especially those participating in peace-keeping operations, in humanitarian and human rights law. This should incorporate specific attention to the needs of children. In the process, the advice and experience of the International Committee of the Red Cross and humanitarian organizations should be sought.

Human rights and humanitarian standards reflect fundamental human values that exist in all societies. Children themselves should know about and understand human rights. One effective way to increase awareness at all levels of society for such instruments is to translate them into understandable terms, for example using stories and the language of local traditions and customs. They can be widely disseminated through the media and popular activities, such as music, art and drama.

THE PROTECTION OF CHILDREN: A PRIORITY FOR THE INTERNATIONAL PEACE AND SECURITY AGENDA

Children are rarely mentioned in reconstruction plans and peace agreements, or in relief and protection measures, yet children must be at the centre of humanitarian, peacemaking and peace-building efforts. Humanitarian and human rights law should be made widely known; it must be understood and implemented by military and security forces as well as humanitarian organizations.

Peace missions, reconciliation forums and all peace-building efforts should incorporate women as key members of negotiating teams. Efforts to prevent gender-based violence should include training for military personnel, including United Nations peace-keepers. Senior officers have sometimes turned a blind eye to the sexual crimes of those under their command, but they must be held accountable for both their own behaviour and that of the personnel they supervise. All peace-keeping personnel should

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receive, as part of their training, instruction on their responsibilities towards civilian communities and particularly towards women and children.

When setting out peace-keeping and demobilization mandates, the protection of children should be considered by the United Nations Security Council. This may include monitoring adherence to human rights and the establishment and maintenance of safe areas and humanitarian access.

ADVOCATING FOR CHILDREN'S RIGHTS: ACTIONS FOR EVERYONE

The international community must do all it can to prevent the outbreak of fighting by addressing the socio-economic roots of conflict and banning arms shipments to conflict zones. All actions to resolve conflicts and implement peace agreements should focus strongly on the needs of women and children, starting with those actions mandated by the United Nations Security Council and the General Assembly or under the responsibilities of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. In the meantime, everything must be done to protect children caught up in armed struggles. Everyone has a responsibility to report violations of the rights of children and to take urgent measures to prevent them.

The success of efforts to protect and promote the rights of children often depends on persuading others of the value of such actions and the need to increase awareness of the critical situation. All individuals, professional practitioners and civil society organizations can take the following steps:

- Encourage Governments to reduce their levels of militarization and to honour the commitments they made at the World Summit for Social Development (Copenhagen, 6-12 March 1995) to support the concept of human security, by taking steps to shift the allocation of resources from arms and military expenditures to human and social development.
- Urge Governments that have not yet become States Parties to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child to do so immediately, and urge Governments that have become States

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Parties to incorporate the Convention into national legislation and programmes.

- Speak out against the use of children as soldiers and promote the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, aimed at raising the age of recruitment into armed forces from 15 to 18 years.
- Mount a vigorous public information campaign to ensure that parents, schools and policy-makers are familiar with local and international human rights standards and humanitarian law, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Assist in creating an enabling environment for child rights activities.
- Support the global campaign for a worldwide ban on the manufacture, sale and distribution of landmines and other weapons that injure and kill mainly civilians, and boycott companies that profit from the production and sale of such weapons.
- Urge Governments to pass laws that eliminate discrimination against child and female-headed households in relation to custody, inheritance and property rights.
- Advocate among all parties to conflicts the principle of children as "zones of peace", to enable vital relief supplies and vaccines to be delivered.
- Encourage paediatricians and other doctors and health workers to disseminate child rights information and report violations encountered in the course of their work. Health professionals have a special obligation to speak out.
- Discourage the institutionalization of children in conflict and post-conflict situations.
- Lobby for the prosecution of rape as a war crime.
- Strengthen women's organizations and networks as a way to maximize women's contribution to protecting the rights of children. Support the participation of women as key members of negotiating teams in peace missions, reconciliation forums and peace-building efforts.

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- Report abuses of children's rights to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights and local ombudsmen.
- Encourage and assist the media in recognizing their responsibility in the promotion of child rights and the protection of children.
- Become involved in conflict resolution and prevention, such as mediation and capacity building activities. Promote community-level peace-building and engage in grass-roots dialogues.

How to report human rights abuses:

Organizations and individuals can report abuses of children's human rights to the Human Rights Hot Line, a 24-hour facsimile line that will allow the United Nations Centre for Human Rights in Geneva to monitor and react rapidly to human rights emergencies. The Hot Line is available to victims of human rights violations, their relatives and non-governmental organizations. The Hot Line fax number in Geneva is + (41-22) 917-0092.

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For further information, please contact:

United Nations Children's Fund
Division of Communication
3 United Nations Plaza
New York, NY 10017, USA
Tel.: (212) 326-7467
Fax: (212) 326-7768
E-mail: pubdec@unicef.org

United Nations Department of Public Information
Development and Human Rights Section, Room S-1040
New York, NY 10017, USA
Tel.: (212) 963-1453
Fax: (212) 963-1186
E-mail: vasic@un.org
Internet: http://www.un.org

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
Office of the Senior Coordinator for Refugee Children
Case Postale 2500
CH-1211 Geneva 2 Dépôt
Switzerland
Tel.: 41-22-739-8111
Fax: 41-22-739-7326
Internet: http://www.unhcr.ch

United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
United Nations Centre for Human Rights
Palais des Nations
CH-1211 Geneva 10
Switzerland
Tel.: 41-22-917-3359
Fax: 41-22-917-0123

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Published by the United Nations Department of Public Information
and the United Nations Children's Fund

DPI/1834–96-22765–October 1996–5M
Reprint–98-98124–May 1998–10M
Printed on recycled paper

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